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ABSTRACT

This booklet is part of a series of seven booklets designed to introduce aspects of effective reading instruction that should be considered when teaching reading to students with disabilities. It focuses on essential skill building and teaching activities related to developing fluent reading. The methods described of teaching reading to students with disabilities have been shown to be particularly effective. An introduction discusses general principles for teaching reading to students with disabilities and emphasizes the importance of individually designing a program based on a student's strengths and needs, parent involvement, and academic modifications. Information is organized into the following sections: what fluent reading is, why it is important, what parents can do, what teachers can do, information for second language learners, and resources. Strategies include assessing the oral reading fluency of the student using appropriate reading-level material, modeling by reading out loud along with a struggling reader, having students read the same short, meaningful story or passage several times out loud, and setting fluency goals with students and having them practice repeated reading until they can meet the goals. (CR)

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"Fluent Reading"

from

Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read

by Carolyn A. Denton
Jan E. Hasbrouck
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PEER is a project of
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Boston, MA

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September 2000

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Parents Engaged in Education Reform (PEER) is a national technical assistance project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. PEER's purpose is to support parents of children with disabilities and their organizations to be informed, active participants in education reform efforts. In addition, to enhance opportunities for early literacy in reading for at-risk students, PEER is providing information and training to parent and community organizations in promising and best practices in literacy.

The Federation for Children with Special Needs is a nonprofit organization based on the philosophy of parents helping parents. Founded in 1974 as a coalition of twelve disability and parent organizations, today the Federation is an independent advocacy organization committed to quality education and health care for all, and to protecting the rights of all children. To this end, the Federation provides information, support, and assistance to parents of children with disabilities, their organizations, their professional partners, and their communities.

For more information about the PEER Project or the Federation for Children with Special Needs, please contact the Federation's Central Office at:
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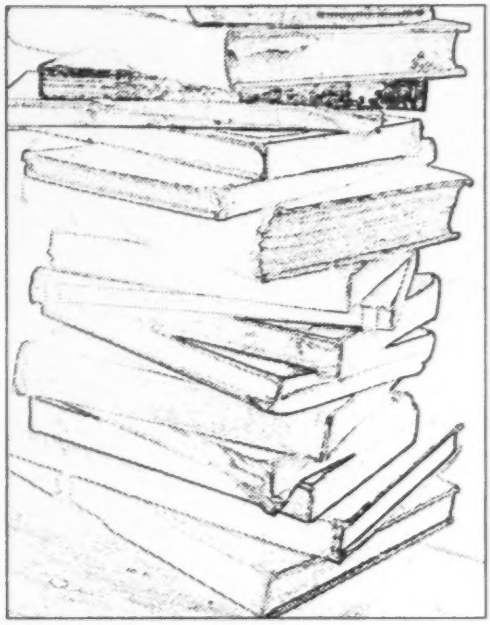
Fluent Reading



Fluent Reading is the fifth of a seven-part series of Resource Briefs that comprises *Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read: A PEER Resource Booklet.* Titles of Resource Briefs in this series of PEER Literacy Resource Briefs include:

Brief #1: Phonological Awareness

Brief #2: Systematic Phonics Instruction

Brief #3: Word Identification

Brief #4: Supported Passage Reading

Brief #5: Fluent Reading

Brief #6: Reading Comprehension

Brief #7: Early Intervention in Reading

Fluent Reading is organized into these sections:

- General principles to keep in mind
- What is fluent reading?
- Why is it important?
- What can parents and teachers do?
- Conclusion
- Resources
- References

General principles to keep in mind

Reading is very important for success in our society, yet as many as one in five students has difficulty learning to read. Most students with learning disabilities, and many students with other types of disabilities, have problems in the areas of reading, writing, and spelling.

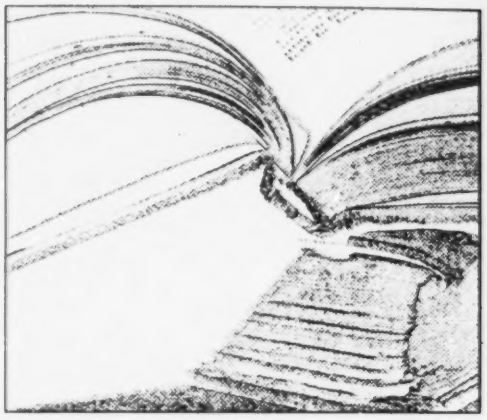
This Literacy Resource Brief introduces parents and teachers to essential skill-building and teaching activities related to developing fluent reading. Methods of teaching reading to students with disabilities described here have been shown to be particularly effective. Some of these methods are used in regular education classrooms for students who are just learning to read (Kindergarten through Grade 2), but they are still relevant and useful for students with disabilities of any age who have not learned to read well. Instructional materials should be selected with an eye toward age appropriateness.

The following key issues in reading instruction for students with disabilities are important regardless of the age or ability level of a student.

- Students with all types of disabilities have the *right* to quality reading instruction, whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school. Parents have the *right* to insist that the school provide instruction designed to help their children with disabilities improve their reading skills. These issues should be addressed in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

- Reading programs for students with disabilities should be individually designed based on a student's strengths and needs. Parents and teachers should not make judgments about a student's ability to learn, or about the best way to teach him or her, based solely on a student's disabling condition or label. Every individual student's abilities, needs, and life situation must be carefully evaluated and considered in the IEP in order to design the best reading program for that student.

- Many students with disabilities may need modifications (changes) in the way they receive instruction, and in the way they fulfill class requirements in order to succeed in areas such as science, social studies, and language arts. These modifications are very important, but *they should not take the place of instruction* designed to help students with disabilities improve their reading skills.



Students with all types of disabilities have the *right* to quality reading instruction, whether they are in elementary, middle, or high school.

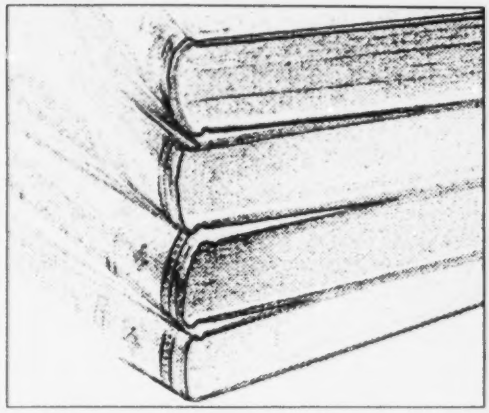
- Parents should, first and always, communicate with their child's teacher(s). Parents can simply ask their child's teacher(s) what can be done to help the child at home. Parents should also recognize themselves and be recognized as important sources of information about their child's interests, abilities, and learning styles. Coordination of school and home efforts is one of the best ways to help a student succeed. Strategies to ensure communication and coordination between school and home can be addressed in the student's IEP.

- The reading material used in reading instruction has to be "not too hard, not too easy," but at the right level for a student. Actual reading of real stories or other material should be part of a student's reading program.

- In the past, some people believed that certain methods of teaching reading were best for students with certain disabilities: that some methods were best for students with brain injury, that others were better for students with learning disabilities, and that still other methods were best for students with mental retardation. This is not the case. The success of a method of teaching reading depends on the content of the program, the way it is taught, the intensity of the instruction (how often and how actively it is taught), and the needs and strengths of the individual student.

- Although different methods of teaching reading may work equally well with students having various disabilities, students benefit when instruction is systematic and structured. Reading skills should be introduced in careful order, and students must be given a great deal of practice and repetition in each skill, so that they master each skill before new ones are introduced.

- **Note for second language learners:** Students who come to school unable to speak English should first be taught



to read in their *native language*. Later, as they gain proficiency in spoken English, they should be taught to extend these skills to reading in English. This practice, however, is not possible in all school situations. Instructional materials may not be available in the child's native language, or there may not be a teacher who can speak and read in the child's native language. If students cannot speak English, and they cannot be taught to read in their native language, they should be given time to develop their proficiency in spoken English before they begin reading instruction. They need to learn English speech sounds and vocabulary. English reading instruction should begin *after* the student can speak English well enough to benefit from instruction.

Reference

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press.

What is fluent reading?

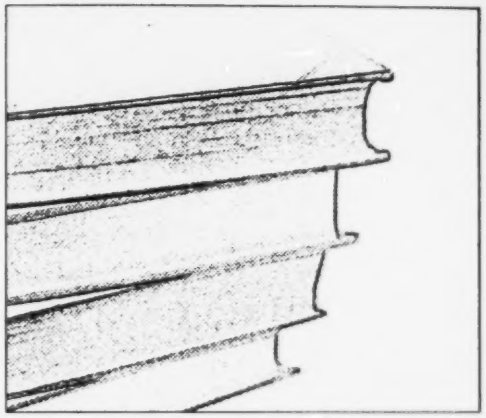
To read fluently means to read smoothly and quickly, recognizing words automatically. Fluent readers read groups of words rather than one word at a time. They pay attention to punctuation marks such as commas and periods when they read. Their reading sounds very much like natural speech.

Think about listening to a poor reader read out loud. Usually, their reading is choppy. They stop and struggle with words, and they read slowly and with great effort. They probably do not read with expression in their voices, and they may ignore punctuation marks like periods, plodding on through one word after another. This is not fluent reading. Unfortunately, many students with disabilities read in this way.

Why is it important?

The purpose of reading is to understand what is being read. Research has shown that people who read fluently are much more likely to understand, or comprehend, what they read. When good readers read a passage, they do not have to think about saying each word correctly. They read the words *automatically*. Their brains are free to concentrate on the meaning of the passage.

Poor readers struggling through the passage word-by-word must pay a lot of attention to saying the words correctly. Since it is impossible to think about two things at one time—and struggling readers have to think about reading each word they see—these readers cannot pay attention to the meaning of the passage. Fluent reading is important because it is a key to understanding what is being read.



The purpose of reading is to understand what is being read. Research has shown that people who read fluently are much more likely to understand, or comprehend, what they read.

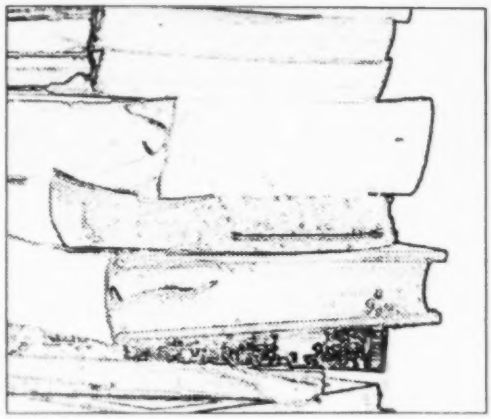
What can parents and teachers do?

First, parents and teachers can assess (or test) the oral reading fluency of a student. It is very important that the passages (or stories) which are used in fluent reading practice are at just the right level of difficulty for the student. If the material is too hard, the student will only become frustrated.

- One quick way to find out if the story is too hard for a student is to count out 100 words in the story or passage and have the student read that section. Then, count the number of mistakes, if any. If there are 10 or more mistakes in 100 words (including words left out or added and words you have to supply), the story is too hard. Choose an easier story for fluency training.

- To find out how many words a student reads correctly per minute, time the student while he or she reads material which is at the appropriate level (not too hard, not too easy) for one minute. Count the number of words they read in the one-minute period. Keep track of how many mistakes are made, and subtract that number from the total number of words read. The resulting number is the words read correctly per minute.

- As students get older, they should read more and more fluently. By the end of first grade, students should be able to read about 60 words correctly in one minute. By the end of second grade, that should increase to about 94 correct words per minute. At the end of third grade, average readers can read 114 words correctly in one minute. That number increases to 118 words at the end of fourth grade and to 128 words at the end of fifth grade. Upper grade students should read between 125 and 150 words correctly in one minute.



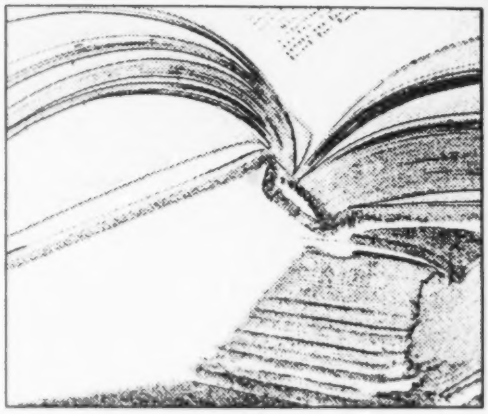
Three methods have been shown to be effective in increasing oral reading fluency: **(1) modeling, (2) repeated reading,** and **(3) goal setting and progress monitoring.** Parents and teachers can use any one of these methods, or a combination of two or three of them, to help students with disabilities learn to read more fluently. These methods are described below.

- **Modeling.** Modeling means reading out loud along with a struggling reader. It can be done by a parent, a teacher, a volunteer, a tutor, or another student who is already a fluent reader. The person doing the modeling simply reads along quietly with the struggling reader, pulling them along with their voices when they get "stuck." It is very important for the person doing the modeling to read slowly enough so that the struggling reader can keep up and read along, but just a little faster than the reader could read on his or her own. The modeling should be done in a smooth way, reading groups of words rather

than one word at a time. In one type of modeling, the teacher or parent sits behind and slightly to the side of the reader and reads along quietly and slowly in the struggling reader's ear. Tape recordings can supply modeling, but it is important that the person on the recording reads slowly enough for the struggling reader to keep up. Most books-on-tape available in stores are too fast. Tapes available with the *Read Naturally* program are specifically designed to be appropriate for students to read along with. (See Resources.) Some computer programs can provide modeling as students read along with them.

- **Repeated Reading.** One well-known way to help struggling readers read more fluently is to have them read the same short, meaningful story or passage several times out loud. This is very much like practicing a hard song on a musical instrument or practicing hitting baseballs until it gets easier and smoother. Choose a story or part of a story which is about 100-200 words long. Have the student read it again and again until it can be read smoothly and quickly. It can help a great deal to add modeling (read along with the student) for the first two or three times the student reads the passage. Have the student spend several minutes every day doing repeated reading.

- **Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring.** In fluency training, this means setting a fluency goal with students and having them practice repeated reading until they can meet that goal. It also means keeping track of how quickly students are able to read each passage they practice every day. For example, if a student can read only 60 words correctly in one minute, the goal could be 90 correct words per minute. Students should practice a new story until they can read it that quickly, and then write down their speed before and after



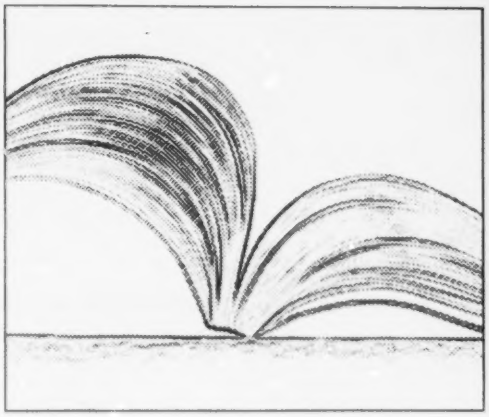
When good readers read a passage, they do not have to think about saying each word correctly. They read the words *automatically.* Their brains are free to concentrate on the meaning of the passage.

they practice the story each day. Speeds should go up as the student practices, helping struggling readers see that they are making progress. Monitoring their progress can make students want to practice reading and help them feel better about their reading ability.

- **Combination Methods.** The best method for increasing fluent reading is to combine modeling, repeated reading and goal setting and progress monitoring. Students practice reading every day. They time themselves reading a new story, and they write down that time. They read the new story with modeling 2 or 3 times. Then they practice it more on their own, reading it several times. They time themselves again, and see whether they have met their goal speed. If they have met their goal, they write down their new reading speed. If not, they keep practicing. A commercial program which combines these methods is *Read Naturally,* which is listed in the Resources.

Conclusion

With proper instruction and support, many more students than previously thought capable of reading can learn to read. Reading can open the door to success, enabling students to live fuller, more independent lives and to succeed in a variety of careers. This **PEER Literacy Resource Brief** has outlined some areas of critical concern in reading



education for students with disabilities. When parents and teachers have access to the information they need, they are better equipped to make decisions about students' educational programs.

Resources

NOTE: These resources may be helpful to teachers and parents. They are listed here merely as options. The authors of this paper do not recommend any particular program, materials, or test.

Read Naturally. 2329 Kressin Ave., St. Paul, Minnesota 55120, (800) 788-4085, readnat@aol.com.

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